

To: The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Robert Oates, retired Physical Education teacher, Reading teacher, Elementary Principal

RE: LD 253, Presented by Senators Daughtry and Rafferty....Requiring HE and PE for a H.S. Diploma.

To whom it may concern,

I began my teaching career in 1974 at Bethlehem Central Schools as an elementary Physical Educator. BCS is a suburb of Albany, N.Y. At our monthly staff meetings I was privy to the group conversations of protecting the requirement of four years of Physical Education in order to graduate...students had to have a passing grade to meet the state requirement by NYS DOE. Our discussions concentrated on course offerings and curriculum.

Since Bethlehem had a pool at the Middle and High schools, every graduate, barring a disability, had to be able to swim 50 yards using any stroke. I had never heard of that and found it unique, which it was. The School Board made it a requirement in the early 60's because they felt the skill would and could save lives. It was not Life Guarding, just swimming to save your life. Bethlehem also won the Section championships in swimming for 29 straight years. There is such a thing as collateral success.

I would move to Guilderland Central Schools after staffing reductions at Bethlehem. There I taught Physical Education at all levels, K-12. It was there that I worked to promote the need for Physical Education at the High School. Many districts were "meeting" the state requirement by allowing athletes on sports teams to be exempt from PE classes offered. I made the case then and now that Physical Education is more than just skills for a sports team. It should teach human movement in all aspects of life...from changing a car tire to shoveling snow.

At parent Open House each Fall, I spoke about our goals in all courses: to allow our students to feel COMPETENT in their physical skills so that they would be CONFIDENT to join in physical activities during their life...that corporate volleyball team, an invitation by your co-workers to play a round of golf, a chance to raise money for charity at a road race, or maybe the confidence to go dancing on a date.

I feel that without that confidence in our own competence, most of us would back out of physical activity, one of the three legs that a healthy lifestyle stands on ...the others being nutrition and sleep.

Our drama club put on a big show each year and I was in charge of buying an ad in the Playbill for our department. This is the ad I ran year after year:

ENGLISH, MATH, SCIENCE AND THE ARTS ARE ALL VITAL TO A GOOD EDUCATION.....
BUT NOT IF YOUR DEAD.....THINK PHYSICAL EDUCATION

High school PE curriculums should not just be sports activities, but should include the physics behind the human movement. I offered one course on Strength, Power and Leverage to 9th and 10th graders where we explored and tested the ways to move things, objects and people. One activity was to move faculty room furniture...chairs, couches and tables...by yourself and with one other person. Knowing leverage and its advantages made moving a couch by yourself, through a door, an activity the students raved about for days. They thought they had to hire someone to do the job.

Physical Education at the high school level should delve into the sciences of kinesiology, biology, physiology and physics. Knowing why you're learning something is as important as being able to perform it. There should be a fitness component and there should be high intensity activity. If we fail to give our students the reasons why it's important, the course material will not be utilized outside of the school....and that is our ultimate goal for their lifetime.

I was teaching high school PE in the late 1990's and had the opportunity to teach a summer dance course at Ithaca College. While walking to my class I passed the parking spot reserved for the college president who was pulling into his spot at that moment. As he exited the car I complimented him on the new fitness center which was just completed for the entire college community, not just the PE majors. He said the 21 million was a sound investment because potential students were asking for more and better fitness centers. He said without one, students were turning away from applying to the college. I told him that was great to hear but I hadn't seen or heard of that back at my high school. It was obvious that something we were doing was taking hold.

Making Physical and Health Education a requirement for graduation does not impact a student's other choices. Most programs are already scheduled into a student's day. What it does do is add a level of importance to the program which is a great incentive. The Greeks had it right....Mind AND Body...the complete human being.

Thank You for your consideration.